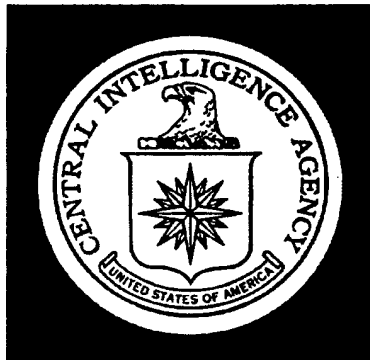


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The Okinawan Issue in Japanese Politics

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THE OKINAWAN ISSUE IN JAPANESE POLITICS

The growth of irredentist sentiment toward Okinawa within all Japanese political parties is reflected in the Sato government's groping for a responsive but responsible policy toward reversion of the US-administered Ryukyu Islands to Japan. Growing national pride and mounting resentment that nearly one million ethnic Japanese in the Ryukyus have remained under alien control for over 20 years account for the rising emphasis on this issue. The government recognizes the importance of the US bases to Far Eastern security and is beginning to study the feasibility of acquiring administrative rights in the islands while preserving the viability of US bases. It may try to negotiate the problem with the US this year or next in order to settle it and keep the subject out of the public debate over the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty when the treaty is subject to review in 1970.

Expectations of Reversion

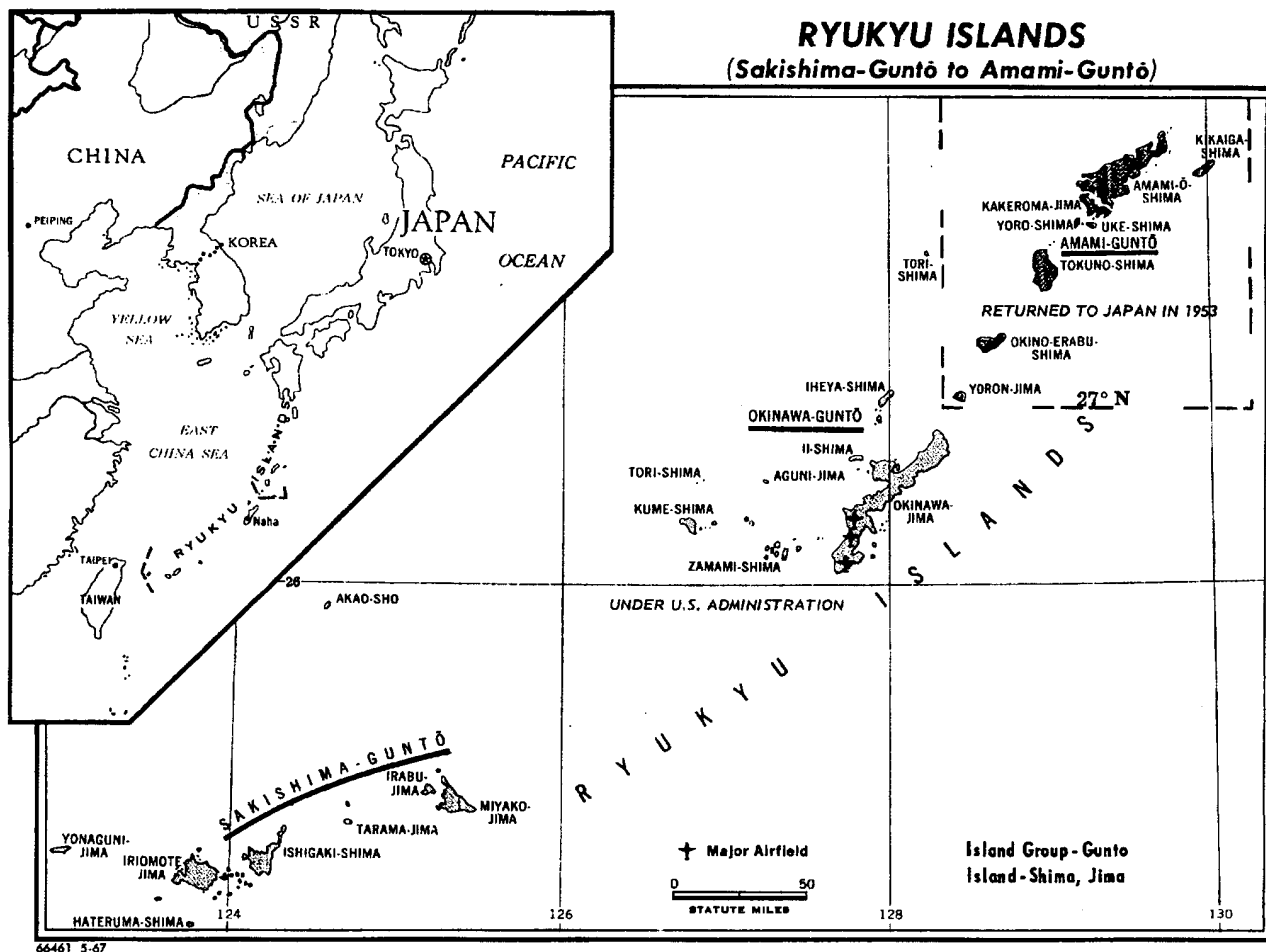
The US, in accord with the concept of residual sovereignty, has recognized Japan's ultimate claims to its prewar prefecture of Okinawa. The US maintains that the reversion to Japan of these islands is contingent on the relaxation of tensions in the Far East sufficient to make US bases unnecessary. As the self-confidence, national pride, and ambition of the Japanese grow, so does their impatience with the lack of clear progress toward their final goal of reversion. Articulate Japanese are asking for a schedule of tangible progress. They consider this only consistent with Japan's place in the world and with its alliance as a partner of the US.

The reversion problem has drawn noticeably more attention since Prime Minister Sato visited Okinawa in August 1965. At that time, he declared that the post-war era would not be over until Okinawa was returned to Japan. Sato's statement was hailed in both Okinawa and in Japan, and he is constantly being reminded of it. The use made of the reversion issue by all political parties, by the press, and on occasion by government officials anxious to assert their patriotism, testifies to the depth of sentiment on this subject.

For the most part, the Japanese Government has tried to control rising public expectations about recovering Okinawa in the near future. At the same time politics

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compels the Sato administration to show its "sincerity" by at least championing pro forma steps which can be interpreted as progress towards reversion. The government has a substantial record both in securing US concurrence in a rapidly expanding program of Japanese financial and technical aid to the Ryukyus, and in advocating US moves to grant Ryukyus a greater degree of self-government. The mainland Japanese tend to view aid and autonomy as but two aspects of an essential effort to reintegrate Okinawa with Japan. Of great symbolic significance to the Japanese has been the government's success this year in winning approval for displaying the Rising Sun flag--albeit beneath a pennant labelled "Ryukyus"--on Okinawan vessels.

Party Positions on Reversion

Many members of Sato's conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), while taking all the credit they can for such concessions, are beginning to feel that the time is about over for temporary palliatives which do not solve the basic desire to establish a firm date for reversion. Far more than any of its rivals, the LDP recognizes the value of the US bases and is beginning to face up to the problems of preserving them. In the past, the LDP rank and file was content to accept a gradual increase of Japan's role in the Ryukyus, hoping that the US requirement for the bases would soon end. Under growing popular pressure for action, however, the LDP is

beginning to consider possible arrangements which would provide for Japanese administration of the islands but allow the US freedom to use its bases there, [REDACTED]

To date the LDP has not openly advocated such a compromise. It is inhibited [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] by public unwillingness to have Japan committed in any way to warfare in Asia. [REDACTED]

If the party advocated taking over administration of the Ryukyus while the bases remain, it would be open to charges of flouting the "no-war clause" of the Japanese constitution. The LDP is well aware that national sentiment demands a solution to the Okinawan problem. Party leaders, however, appear hopeful that growing public understanding of Japan's international position will resolve the dilemma in the context of Japan's defense role in the Far East.

All the opposition parties, led by the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), the chief opposition force, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] They have mounted a pincers movement in current Diet debates seeking to trap the LDP between a "do-nothing" stand on reversion and a position which they could claim would open the way for the nuclearization of Japan.

The JSP demands the immediate unconditional return of the islands. All military bases there

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would be excluded, even any under the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, which the party considers unconstitutional. The Socialists maintain that the bases invite hostile attack on Japan, involve Japan in US strategy in Southeast Asia, and might drag Japan into war under the security treaty. The party has already launched a campaign to terminate the treaty in 1970, and regards the reversionist movement as the critical lever in that campaign.

Anti-Americanism has been a principal theme of the JSP since the early postwar years and underlies the party's appeal to Japanese nationalism on the Okinawan issue. The JSP's recent display of patriotic wrath over incidents of alleged desecration of the Rising Sun flag in Okinawa illustrated this approach.

Along more traditional Marxist lines, the JSP stresses the "colonial" exploitation of Okinawa by US "capitalist imperialism." It plays up the economic and social disparity between Japan and Okinawa to prove how far the Ryukyans are lagging behind the motherland.

With the exception of the Communists, who try to outdo the Socialists in attacking the US, the small opposition parties make little use of anti-Americanism on the Okinawan issue. The moderate Democratic Party (DSP), which does not demand the immediate termination of the security treaty, is not committed to unconditional abolition of US bases in Okinawa and might tolerate them

in a "reverted" Okinawa [REDACTED]

The DSP fully recognizes the force of awakening Japanese nationalism. The Seamen's Union, the chief constituent of DSP's trade union backing, fired the opening gun in the campaign to allow Okinawan ships to fly the Rising Sun. This union is competing with a rival trade union federation supporting the Japanese Socialists.

The new Clean Government Party (Komeito), the mouthpiece of the Buddhist Soka Gakkai sect, has thrived on rising nationalism and exploits its reversionist aspects. The party calls for prompt reversion [REDACTED]

Komeito is keenly aware of the interests of its fast-growing list of converts on Okinawa, who have been remarkably successful in local elections there.

Party Relations With the Ryukyus

All of Japan's parties are involved in one way or another with parties in Okinawa. This ensures that whenever a reversionist issue arises in one place it is quickly reflected in the other. Only the LDP, because of its responsibility for governing Japan, ever uses its influence with the ruling Okinawa Democratic Party (ODP) to quiet things down. The party is not always successful, even though the ODP, like all Okinawan groups, looks to Japan for advice and guidance.

Petitions, testimonials, and delegations of Okinawan politicians are warmly welcomed by partisan

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problem advanced by LDP politicians, the government has so far managed to keep its options open. Each spring during the past three years it has sanctioned private or semiofficial visits to the US by champions of two sets of proposals for partial restoration of administrative rights.

Under the first of these plans, certain special functions, such as education and social security, would be assigned to Japanese administration. This approach was presented informally in the US by a Japanese mission in 1965, was espoused by the director-general of the prime minister's office following a visit to Okinawa in 1966, and is currently being presented in greater detail by a private mission to the US led by the head of a new advisory committee on Okinawa in the prime minister's office. This functional "creeping reversion" formula would create a condominium in which the piecemeal return of administrative rights to Japan would progressively diminish the US role. Sato's recognition of US opposition to this approach probably persuaded him to throw some cold water on it in the course of his election campaign last January.

The Japanese have also shown interest in a geographical approach. This called for the return of administrative rights by region, excluding US bases for the time being. Under a plan advanced by a fact-finding mission to the US in 1966, outlying islands would be returned to Japan, leaving Okinawa with its concen-

tration of bases under US administration. This particular scheme has apparently been abandoned, probably because it was feared that a partial solution on its lines would prejudice the prospects for the reversion of the majority of the Ryukyuan population, which lives on Okinawa.

To meet such objections and to show its responsiveness, the government seems to have turned recently to a far more comprehensive geographical approach. In February, the vice foreign minister bluntly stated in public that the only way to recover the Ryukyus "fully" was to assure the US free use of its bases, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The dilemma posed by his suggestion provoked considerable debate, which, however, was far freer of [REDACTED] hysteria than would have been the case even as recently as a year ago. This suggests that the government may soon decide to approach the US to work out some such arrangements.

Recent suggestions would leave the bases in US hands but return the rest of the islands' area--over 70 percent of the total--to Japan. Responsible Japanese officials have been made aware of the intricate involvement of the bases in most aspects of Okinawan life, but top leaders may have concluded that some sort of separation of the bases represents their only remaining possibility. At a high-level meeting in mid-March the Foreign Ministry reportedly came around to the views of the prime minister's office that the principal bases should be left

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sponsors in the homeland, thus increasing the pressure upon the government to "do something" about Okinawa. The government is often embarrassed by the troublesome persistence of the visiting islanders and by prominent government officials wooing "the Okinawan constituency," without regard for over-all government policies.

The leftist opposition in Japan has regularly joined the Okinawans in commemorating "Reversion Day" on 28 April, the anniversary of the signing of the peace treaty with the US which left the Ryukyus under US control. Marches are held in Japan and Okinawa, and Japanese and Okinawans meet at sea on the 27th parallel, the northern boundary of the US-administered Ryukyu Islands and a symbol of "divided Japan."

Government Policy Reappraisal

Stimulated by growing political and popular pressures for action, the Sato government has begun to reappraise its stand on reversion, both in preparation for debate on Okinawa in the current Diet session and in connection with plans for handling the security treaty issue in 1970. Beginning that year the treaty can be terminated on one year's notice; otherwise it continues in effect. The left has for several years been preparing for a repeat of the crisis surrounding the treaty's ratification in 1960, and there is bound to be widespread discussion of the

treaty even without formal Diet debate as 1970 approaches.

The political situation in the Ryukyus is another factor at least partly responsible for current interest in reversion. The Ryukyuan legislature has been paralyzed ever since February when mob action blocked consideration of two long-standing bills to curb the political power of the teachers. The crisis has caused grave concern for the ODP's fate in the elections scheduled for November 1968 when control of both the legislature and the executive could be lost to strongly reversionist forces. A new and popular stance on reversion by the LDP could help its sister party in Naha.

Despite these current pressures, some LDP reversionists seem to be concerned that sentiment for reunion with the homeland may wane among the rising generation of Okinawans. A recent public opinion survey in Okinawa indicated that strong reversionist sentiment is largely confined to Okinawans over thirty and that the younger generation moving toward positions of influence in the Ryukyus is the least sympathetic to the idea of joining a country it has never known. In Japan, some in government--and many outside--therefore may wish to seize the present occasion to formalize a plan for reversion before such a trend weakens Japan's chances.

In the face of a variety of proposals for solving the Okinawa

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under direct US administration so Japan could avoid responsibility for US activities in them.

Prospects

The government probably cannot afford to vacillate much longer on its approach to the reversion issue. It has bought peace in the present Diet session by acceding to opposition demands for a new committee on Okinawa. If the government can show some progress toward reversion, it may be able to head off an embarrassing and potentially explosive debate on relations with the US in general. To this end it will probably seek to open negotiations with the US later this year, or early next year.

The second aspect of the Sato government's efforts to dampen debate on Okinawa is to educate the public on Japan's defense needs in the nuclear-armed world. There are signs that this educational campaign is bearing fruit. For the first time since their defeat in World War II the Japanese are beginning publicly to consider defense problems realistically.

At the moment, however, this aspect of reviving Japanese nationalism--the new tendency to consider defense problems--still is weaker than reversionist sentiment, and it may remain that way. At any time, moreover, an incident on Okinawa might inflame nationalist passions and force the government into direct confrontation with the US. ~~(SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)~~

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